



FOREST BOOTS

In a series of articles, the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest is recognizing employees for the important work they do and highlighting a variety of U.S. Forest Service careers.

Sierra Brewer, Civil Engineer, PE Supervisor's Office



Named after the Sierra Nevada Mountains near her hometown of Winnemucca, Sierra Brewer may have seemed destined to work for the U.S. Forest Service. Although she grew up enjoying hiking, camping, and hunting, working for a land management agency was the farthest thing from her mind.

"I was the first in my family to attend college. I studied civil engineering at the University of Nevada in Reno," said Sierra. "If anyone had asked me about working for the Forest Service, I would have thought all the jobs were for botanists and wildlife biologists. I never thought there would be a place for me there!"

During college, Sierra had interned with Farr West Engineering in Reno and was hired after she graduated. When she was laid off a few years later, she began to look for new opportunities.

"I had joined the Society of Women Engineers when I was in college. My mentor, Natalie Little, was working for the Forest Service. She passed along an outreach notice for a civil engineering internship with the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest," said Sierra.

Sierra applied and in 2010 was hired through the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) (now known as the Pathways Program). As a Civil Engineer based in Sparks, Nevada, Sierra designs and coordinates construction projects for campgrounds, bridges, buildings, dams, water systems, and many other projects.

She is also licensed as a Professional Engineer (PE) by the Nevada Board of Professional Engineers.

Sierra explained that much of the work she does is not typical for her profession. "Most engineers just design, but Forest Service engineers also do maintenance, implementation, and operations. We may work with our own crews or with contractors on construction. We also work closely with the budget office to make sure that money is spent correctly and appropriately on our projects."



This variety of job duties keeps Sierra's work fresh and interesting. "I love the combination of office and field work," she said. "I even like writing reports! When there is a wildfire, I get to help by working on a buying team, where we are responsible for ordering supplies. There is always something new and different going on! I never thought I would end up working here, but I love it!"

Sierra also helps the next generation of students learn about opportunities with the Forest Service. "Every year I give presentations to local high schools and colleges about my career path and experiences, I always get great feedback!" she said.

"There are so many different programs with the Forest Service, I would advise anyone who might be interested to try working with us for a season to see if

they like it. Also, students who enjoy problem-solving and being innovative should consider engineering. It is a challenging and rewarding career, especially in the Forest Service, for people who like to figure out how to make things work."

From the office to the field, boots symbolize the work the U.S. Forest Service employees do caring for the land...

Sierra recalls an unusual incident called "Project Peanut Butter Clean-up" that ruined her first pair of field boots...

"A few years ago there was an accident involving a semi truck that overturned onto Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest lands on California State Route 4. The driver was OK, but he had been hauling a cargo of peanut butter, which spilled all over. I helped with the clean-up effort, which took all day. It was also rancid because it sat out there for a year before we could take care of it. We had to wait for the insurance claim to be settled before we could move anything. Bears had been eating it, and it was a huge mess. I got spoiled peanut butter all over my boots because I was walking through it. They were caked, and it was disgusting! I ended up having to throw them out. I really miss those boots. They were so comfortable! I finally found a replacement pair that also fits well. I definitely will not be walking through any peanut butter in these boots!"